

Heed teen drivers, says death study

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Motor-vehicle crashes are again the leading cause of preventable deaths for Arizona's children, with 134 killed during 2005, according to a new ASU study.

Teen drivers account for much of the mayhem, the study found, with drug and alcohol use, reckless driving and failure to use seat belts major contributing factors.

The study, undertaken by the Center for Health Information and Research at Arizona State University, examined every death of people younger than 18 during 2005, totaling 1,148, and found that 388 of them, about a third, were preventable. About 250 members of Arizona Child Fatality Review Teams were involved in the research.

"Given the ages of the children involved, we really need to address teen driving," said Dr. Mary Rimsza, medical director of the ASU research center and chairwoman of the fatality review teams. "Parents need to supervise their kids and make sure they are using their restraints, driving safely and making sure they have enough driving experience."

The fatality review teams recommended that:

- Arizona should strengthen its graduated-license laws so that young drivers gain sufficient experience.
- Parents ensure that their adolescents have enough driving experience and display good driving behavior before they are allowed to drive without an adult.
- Enforcement and penalties be strengthened for teens who disobey traffic laws or fail to use seat belts.
- Laws on child safety restraints be strengthened and strongly enforced.